

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:
 - sensing the identity of a customer;
 - selectively providing the customer access to a first secure area based upon the sensed identity, the first secure area being connected to a plurality of second secure areas, one of which includes a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;
 - selectively providing the customer access to the second secure area based upon the sensed identity, the second secure area including the piece of equipment to be rented by the customer.
2. The method of claim 1, further including the step of:
 - recording what the customer removes from the second secure area in an automated manner.
3. The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:
 - comparing what the customer removes from the second secure area to a list of equipment corresponding to the customer; and
 - recording the difference between what the customer takes from the second secure area and the list of equipment corresponding to the customer in an automated manner.
4. The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:

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comparing what the customer removes from the second secure area to a list of equipment corresponding to the customer; and

preventing the customer from leaving the first secure area if what the customer takes from the second secure area does not match the list of equipment corresponding to the customer.

5. The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:
starting a recording device when the identity of the customer is sensed; and

stopping the recording device after a predetermined amount of time has passed.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the recording device includes one or more security cameras.

7. The method of claim 1, further including the step of:
permitting the customer to return the piece of equipment.

8. A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:

sensing the identity of a customer;

selectively providing the customer access to a secure area based upon the sensed identity, the secure area including a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;

sensing an identifier on the piece of equipment as the equipment is moved within a predetermined distance from an exit of the secure area; and

allowing the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area.

9. The method of claim 8, further including the step of:
allowing the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area when the identity of the customer corresponds to the identifier on the piece of equipment.

10. The method of claim 9, further including the step of:
automatically recording what the customer removes from the secure area.

11. The method of claim 9, further including the steps of:
starting a recording device when the identity of the customer is sensed; and
stopping the recording device after a predetermined amount of time has passed.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the recording device includes one or more security cameras.

13. A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:
sensing the identity of a customer;
selectively providing the customer access to one of a plurality of secure areas based upon the sensed identity, the one secure area containing a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer; and

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allowing the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the one secure area.

14. The method of claim 13, further including the step of:
automatically recording what equipment the customer removes from the one secure area.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the customer identity indicates that the customer is a member of an approved group of renters and wherein the one secure area includes equipment available to the approved group of renters.

16. A system for managing rental equipment, comprising:
a first secure area;
a plurality of second secure areas accessible from the first secure area, one of which is assigned to a customer; and
an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the second secure area assigned to the customer.

17. The system of claim 16, further including
a sensor that records a piece of equipment removed from the second secure area.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the sensor includes at least one of: radio frequency identification tag reader and bar code reader.

19. The system of claim 17, wherein the sensor includes a GPS-based sensor.

20. The system of claim 16, further including a sensor that records a piece of equipment returned to the second secure area.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein the sensor includes at least one of: radio frequency identification tag reader and bar code reader.

22. The system of claim 20, wherein the sensor includes a GPS-based sensor.

23. The system of claim 16, further including a sensor that records goods removed from the second secure area.

24. A system for managing rental equipment, comprising:
a secure area including a piece of equipment to be rented by a customer;

an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the secure area when an identity of the customer is verified; and

a sensor that senses an identifier on the piece of equipment and directs the access controller to allow the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area when the identifier on the piece of equipment corresponds to the identity of the customer.

25. The system of claim 24, further including:
a tracking system that automatically records the equipment removed by the customer.

26. A method of managing goods, comprising the steps of:
sensing the identity of a customer;
selectively providing the customer access to a first secure area based upon the sensed identity, the first secure area being connected to a plurality of second secure areas, one of which includes goods to be purchased by the customer;

selectively providing the customer access to the second secure area based upon the sensed identity, the second secure area including the goods to be purchased by the customer.

27. The method of claim 26, further including the step of:
recording what the customer removes from the second secure area in an automated manner.

28. The method of claim 26, further including the steps of:
comparing what the customer removes from the second secure area to a list of goods corresponding to the customer; and
recording the difference between what the customer takes from the second secure area and the list of goods corresponding to the customer in an automated manner.

29. A system for providing goods to a customer, comprising:
a first secure area;

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a plurality of second secure areas accessible from the first secure area, one of which is assigned to a customer; and
an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the second secure area assigned to the customer.

30. The system of claim 29, further including
a sensor that records goods removed from the second secure area.

31. A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:
sensing the identity of a customer;
selectively providing the customer access to a secure area based upon the sensed identity, the secure area associated with the customer; and
sensing an identifier on a piece of equipment as the equipment is moved within a predetermined distance from an entrance of the secure area.

32. The method of claim 31, further including the step of:
automatically recording what the customer returns to the secure area.

33. A method of managing goods, comprising the steps of:
sensing the identity of a customer;
selectively providing the customer access to a secure area based upon the sensed identity, the secure area including goods to be purchased by the customer;
sensing an identifier on the goods as the goods are moved within a predetermined distance from an exit of the secure area; and

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allowing the customer to remove the goods from the secure area.

34. A system for managing goods, comprising:
- a secure area including goods to be purchased by a customer;
 - an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the secure area when an identity of the customer is verified; and
 - a sensor that senses an identifier on the goods and directs the access controller to allow the customer to remove the goods from the secure area when the identifier on the goods corresponds to the identity of the customer.